

HOW EMOTIONAL, ECONOMIC AND MATERIAL DEPENDENCY MAY PRODUCE POVERTY FOR WOMEN

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Abstract: Dependencies, mainly for women, represent a factor that studies from '70s on have detected as originating a greater risk of social exclusion and vulnerability and, ultimately, of poverty. Main dimensions of dependency emerged from literature regard following aspects: 1) economic (income sources); 2) material (non-economic help in the management of the household from family of origin and friends); 3) emotional (need of an external emotional support). This contribution originates from a 2012 research on poverty and social exclusion, conducted in Italy by National Research Council, involving almost 1000 subjects. Three indexes have been built, referring to different dependencies detected by literature: Economic Dependency Index (EDI), Material Dependency Index (MDI) and Emotional Dependency Index (EDI). These indexes, together with other indicators, have been used with the aim of comparing female versus male respondents. Furthermore, women' profiles have been drawn out that are potentially vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion (elderly women, women with precarious jobs and divorcees) more than others.

Keywords: poverty, dependencies, feminization of poverty

INTRODUCTION

Theoretical approaches to the relation between dependency and poverty

In the last three decades many studies have highlighted that women constitute a part of the population more vulnerable to poverty and exclusion than men: family structure, various models of work/life balance - and as a frequent consequence - different career tracks are the main factors determining a high risk of impoverishment for women. This is the phenomenon that Diana Pearce, over 30 years ago, defined "Poverty feminization" [1].

Families "defamiliarized" (namely split up because of separations or widowhood) [2] or families in which an imbalanced distribution of tasks may cause less

opportunity for women to invest in their own working career, producing economic dependency.

But work difficulties for women regard also their career tracks: lower level work position than men, lower wages and less career chances [3][4].

Also welfare policies and compensatory interventions, if primly referring to a traditional family model, may be less effective because is unable to fit the needs of single women (unmarried women, lone mothers, widows...) or women who cannot dispose of their husband's income. To this, we can add the non-admission of women's caring [5], Unwaged work [6], and the consequences on opportunity for women to achieve a better economic autonomy or to succeed in waged work like men. All these mechanism may contribute directly or indirectly in *feminizing poverty*, a phenomenon with an increasing relevance: a greater and greater number of poor in the world are females [7][8].

Literature in this field shows a strict relation between impoverishment of women and their *dependencies*: more dependent women get poor more frequently than others.

Why "*dependencies*"? Dependency is a concept that has a strong influence on women's wellbeing: a high level of dependency may cause attitudes of distrust, fear, lack of knowledge of their own abilities and a strong inclination to give up. But dependency is also a multifaceted concept: Fraser and Gordon [9] talk about semantic genealogy of dependencies: dependency can be expressed by economic terms, for example a person may depend on another one or on an institution for their subsistence; dependency can be expressed in socio-legal terms, because it may reveal a lack of a public identity, like for *coverture* referring to women's legal status after marriage: the legal existence of woman is suspended during the marriage and the husband is bound to support her [10, p.54]; dependency may also be a political term (to be dependent on an external ruling power) and a psychological one, an individual character trait like lack of will power or excessive emotional neediness [9, p.312]. Dependency can emerge in different spheres such as a private (a woman dependent on her partner or on family network) and a public one (dependent on social policies) [11].

Bimbi distinguishes between “preferred” - or “natural” - and “stigmatized” dependencies [12]. “Natural” dependency, is generally well tolerated because is perceived as resulting from emotional and family ties [13], so that it has constituted the basis of many welfare policies. On the contrary, public dependency is highly stigmatized. It happens for many reasons: a *moral* idea of how things would work better but also the annoyance for the transfer of duties and costs that should be the responsibility of the family onto society.

Land, in his studies, refers to dependency as a gendered concept: it is linked to a typically female compulsive altruism [14] that moves between the “compulsory love work” and the vicious circle of mutual dependency [15][16]. Women, indeed, think they are better able to care for others, certainly more than what could be done by anyone else in the household. Analysis shows how the social value of autonomy linked to income is subject to the importance accorded to caring [17].

If there is a causal link between the almost exclusive responsibility of women for caring and their dependency, poverty and social exclusion [12] then support networks are needed to help women with child care and with economic issues [18]. Thanks to supporting networks women may participate in the public sphere [10]. This refers to complex weaving existing between dependency and interdependence [14][19][13]. As it has been summarized, “the welfare dependency of an adult woman is likely to solve the greater independence of another person, young or old” [20][16]. Obviously, dependency is not something “static”: women (but also men) negotiate frequently their roles in mutual relationships (particularly power relationships) in their lifetime. Consequently people may experience different level of autonomy/dependency.

METHOD

In this paper we analyzed data collected under a project granted by Lazio Council with the aim to obtain information about the socio-economic life situation of resident people who live in this area.

In this research a concept of poverty as multidimensional and dynamic deprivation was adopted. This deprivation affects different aspects of a person's life, such as social and economic conditions (the inclusion/exclusion in relation to the job market and to the family social network of reference) and psychological-motivational (as attributive style, life goals and trouble in achieving them. [21,24]).

The sample, consisting of 1000 adult subjects residing in Lazio, was stratified by three socio-demographic variables: population size of municipality of residence, sex, and age. The strata sample were calculated by census data gathered from the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) about resident population in Lazio on January 1, 2008 [22].

Items of the semi-structured questionnaire we used, were referable to the following thematic areas: poverty, social-demographic information, occupational status, income, housing conditions, sense of security linked to possession of assets, debt, economic status, difficulty, supporting networks, opinions and subjective experience.

This study considers for some analyses data for the entire sample (N=992), whereas for other analyses a subgroup of the sample (just women. n=534) and it's focused on the themes shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Conceptual dimensions and indicators

Concepts	Conceptual dimensions	Indicators
Social demographic variables	-	Age; sex ;educational qualification; marital Status
Socio-economic and psychological conditions	Psychological motivation	Concern about cost of living; past/future economic conditions assessment
	Economic	Personal Income; familiar Income; debts; ability to deal with an unforeseen expenditure
	Social	Employment status; unemployed status
Dependency	Material Dependency	Organizational aid by the family/friends' network
	Economic Dependency	Income sources; economic family aid
	Emotional Dependency	Need of emotional support

DATA ANALYSIS

In order to create readable outputs, the data have been organized into social profiles. The first group of profiles shows, in a comparative form, the social-economic status of male and female. The second group of profiles shows descriptive information about the economic conditions of women by clusters. In agreement with Ruspini [23], who argues that concepts such as dependency have a key role in the study of woman's conditions, in this paper we show two dependency indexes built from the available data: Material Dependency Index (MDI) and Economic Dependency Index (EDI). In the following tables we show how indexes have been built:

Table 2: Material Dependency Index (MDI)

		Management support by the family network			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
Management support by the friends' network	Low	431 (1)	119 (1)	289 (2)	839
	Medium	42 (1)	22 (2)	42 (3)	106
	High	11 (2)	2 (3)	17 (3)	30
Total		484	143	348	975

(1): Low dependency. (2): Medium dependency. (3): High dependency

Table 3: Economic Dependency Index (EDI)

		Income sources		Total
		Family support	Working Independence	
Economic family aid	Low	46 (2)	493 (1)	539
	Medium	43 (2)	123 (2)	166
	High	134 (3)	111 (2)	245
Total		223	727	950

(1): Low dependency. (2): Medium dependency. (3): High dependency

Emotional Dependency

Moreover, by using outcomes of an item of the questionnaire, specifically aimed to detecting emotional aspects, the emotional dependency dimension has been deepened. The item was "I need an external emotional support", and a 5-point concordance/discordance Likert scale was provided to respondents. The five levels of the scale were, later, condensed in two steps (disagree/agree) with the aim of facilitating analyses.

Psychological, social-economic conditions of males and females in Lazio

This section of data analysis examines gender differences placing them in a comparative perspective and it outlines some relevant characteristics to differentiate between men and women in regards to psycho-motivational and socio-economic dimensions. We tried to draw a demarcation line which takes into account both the influence of sex on socio-economic status acquired in the context of reference (in this specific case, Lazio), and the specific role that material dependency and material/management factors may assume in the specification of this process.

We tried to check the available data through the assumption that sex is generally related to the acquisition of a particular socio-economic status, causing reproduced and consolidate gender dependency by the same socio-economic and psychological condition of reference.

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Table 3: Psychological-motivational dimension

Women	% ¹	Men	%
How do you spend your money?*** ²			
House	34,6%	Family	42,8%
		Personal wellbeing	30,7%
		Personal education	1,4%
How do you spend your free time?****			
Spouse, children, house	62,3%	Personal education, recreation, wellbeing	57,7%
Evaluation of past economic condition			
Deteriorated	47,1%	Improved	4,4%
		Stable	47,8%
Cost of living anxiety **			
High	36,3%	Absent	3,2%
Medium	53,3%	Low	13,9%
Forecast of economic condition for the next 12 months ****			
I don't know	30,3%	Improving	18,9%
		Stable	36%
		Deteriorating	29,1%

These data confirm what it is widely believed that is women place the house sphere first and men place more importance on work, on larger political and economic context and - as breadwinners - on household budget.

Table 4: Economic dimension: income and economic difficulty

Women	%	Men	%
Personal income ***			
Medium-low	40,2%	High	34,4%
Very low	30,2%	Medium-high	20,3%
Familiar income ***			
0-1000 euro	33,1%	1751-2500 euro	29,9%
1001-1750 euro	22,4%	Over 2500 euro	25,8%
Household's possibility to deal with an unexpected expenditure of 600 euro *			
No	35,3%	Yes	66,2%
I do not know	5,1%		

The distribution of personal income by sex shows that women earn less than men. When familiar income or possibility to deal with a 600€ expense are considered, women relate lower values than men: this may be due to the remarkable amount of one-parent households or separated/divorced women (9,6%).

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¹ The percentages reported in table 3 are calculated on the total of males and females in the sample. For example, the 47,1% of women in the sample considers as deteriorated the past economic condition of their family in front of a smaller percentage of men.

² For this table and for the following ones: *: p<,1; **: p<,05; ***: p<,005; ****: p<,000.

Table 5: Social dimension

Women	%	Men	%
Educational level ***			
Secondary school qualific.	45,7%	Junior secondary school qualific.	34,5%
Degree or post-degree	18,4%		
No title or primary school qualific.	12,4%		
Occupation ***			
Non self-empl. worker	71,7%	Self-empl. worker	35,2%
Part-time job	28,4%	Full-time job	82,7%
Unemployed working condition ****			
Housewife	46,8%	Unemployed	48,4%
Subordinated and illegal	7,3%	Retired	30,9%
		Student	30,5%
		Looking for a first occup.	6,3 %
Marital status ****			
Separated and divorced	11,4%	Married	51,2%
Widow	15,5%	Single	38,3%

Our data shows that having a higher degree produces changes in the employment especially for women. It should be stressed however that the presence of a higher degree (graduate and postgraduate) is not sufficient to erase the wage gap and the difference in opportunities for higher level positions in the employment situation that continues to favor men.

Sex differences in employment status increase with the presence of children. In cases of a higher education, this gap tends to persist. It increases for subordinated and illegal off-the-book workers.

There are also differences in worked hours between women and men: 22,4% of women have a part time job and 82,7% of men have a full-time job.

These data, which persist even under conditions of higher education of women, suggest that family care remains a woman's prerogative and that this commitment can be reconciled with the workload only if it has a limited amount of hours per day.

Table 6: Material dependency and economic dependency

Women	%	Men	%
Material dependency*			
Low	61,8%	High	8,6%
Medium	33,6%		
Economic dependency ****			
Medium	39,2%	Low	62,5%
High	16,4%		

The MDI doesn't show statistical significance in comparison between women and men; the trends through percentage deviation are consistent with the hypothesis that men have a greater dependency than women. These differences become more evident when both men and women are low-educated.

The EDI which shows a high statistical significance, is a reversal of what obtained with the MDI.

The economic dependency of men and women crossed with age, tends to have a similar trend. The dependency is greater for men and young women (aged 18-34 years), and it decreases as age increases, becoming minimal among those over 65 for both genders.

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Table 7: Emotional dependency and sex

Women	Δ n obs./exp. (%)	Men	Δ n obs./exp. (%)
Low	-1,8	Low	1,9
High	5,4	High	-5,8

Data show that emotional dependent women are quite significantly less than expected (-1,8%), whereas women with high emotional dependency are more than expected (+5,4%). As we can see in following table (Table 9), a significant relation between emotional dependency and both levels of economic and material dependency. We can hence hypothesize that being in economic or material dependency influence feeling emotionally dependent for women (analyses of Table 9 have been conducted on the subsample of females).

Table 8: Emotional dependency, EDI and MDI

Economic dependency ****			
	Δ n obs./exp. (%)		Δ n obs./exp. (%)
Low		High	
Low	12,4	High	47,6
High	-35,8	Low	-16,5
Material dependency ***			
	Δ n obs./exp. (%)		Δ n obs./exp. (%)
Low		High	
Low	7,8	High	48,8
High	-22,0	Low	-17,4

DISCUSSION

Concurring with literature, the gap between women's and men's occupational status is in part referable to the wide diffusion of a traditional family-model that gives the breadwinner role to men and family caring to women. Women take part time jobs in order to reconcile the need to work with the needs of their family. In order to support this need, "women-shaped professions" were created; this jobs take up little time but they are low remunerative with few opportunities to move ahead.

It is necessary not just consider family income but to specify the resources managed by women. The data of this study confirm previous literature: the family income disguises different strategies the women use to cope with economic difficulties. This is the case of housewives and young short-term employees who overcome their economic hardships through their spouse's or their family of origin's income. Single women create a balance between their needs, available resources and savings. All this factors allow them to confront their economic hardship, without leaving measurable signs.

From the outcomes of this research it seems in part that a high educational level is a hindrance to a dependency condition, because qualification allows women to get prestigious and remunerative occupations. Even social conventions contribute to conceal the economic gap between women and men. This condition, in fact, does not appear immediately in our gender analysis of the unemployed. Men who are looking for their first job and who are unemployed define themselves as "non-occupied", whereas unemployed woman generally tend to report themselves as housewives.

If we conceptualize poverty by referring only to economic dimension, the sex differences tend to reduce. If we consider poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon, linked not only to the economic conditions of families, but also to opportunities for a socio-cultural growth and for the development of an independent living, then the gender gap remains unresolved. From this point of view, our findings are consistent with the importance given by Ruspini [23] to the level of analysis in the readability of female poverty: identifying family as the only level of analysis means to give up the opportunity of study this phenomenon in relation to the dynamics taking place inside families.

Our study offers some observations for the policy-makers. In this field, different policy to promote women employment status, are based on measures that reconcile working and family loads. The fact that women work for less time seems to have a key role in maintaining the condition of economic dependency produced by the salary gap between men and women. In fact this type of intervention tends to stabilize the centrality of the family context than working context in women lives.

However, the welfare interventions should aim to a different load balance between the two sexes and/or to the reduction of women caring role. From this point of view the achievement of quality services for children and the elderly can more effectively support the employability of women and reduce gender gap in this area.

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